

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method for franking a communication, comprising:
selecting a frank comprising a value from among a plurality of frank types,
5 each of the frank types having a pre-assigned value;
associating the frank with the communication; and
initiating transmission of the franked communication across a network.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the pre-assigned values are assigned by a
10 franking server prior to the step of selecting a frank.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the step of selecting a frank comprises:
determining the value for the frank;
transmitting the a request for a frank corresponding to the value across the
15 network to a franking server; and
receiving the frank across the network.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein:
each of the plurality of frank types corresponds to a service class; and
20 the pre-assigned value of each of the frank types varies with the service class.
5. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of determining a value for the frank
comprises:

determining a first and a second class for the frank; and
assigning the value to the frank based on combination of the first and second
class.

5 6. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of determining a value for the frank
comprises:

determining at least one category for the communication; and
assigning the value to the frank based on the category.

10 7. The method of claim 5, wherein the step of assigning the value to the frank
based on combination of the first and second class comprises assigning a value
discounted relative to the value of the first class plus the value of the second class.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of initiating transmission of the
15 franked communication across a network comprises initiating transmission of the
franked communication across an Internet-protocol network.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the network is a circuit-switched network.

20 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the network is a packet-switched network.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein the network is an asynchronous transport
mode network.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the frank.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the frank is locally stored in a database.

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14. The method of claim 12, wherein the frank is stored on a magnetically,
optically, or magnetically and optically readable medium.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the magnetic medium is affixed to a card.

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16. The method of claim 1, wherein:
the network is a local network; and
the franking server is an automated teller machine.

15 17. The method of claim 3, wherein the frank is received via an electronic mail
account.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the electronic mail account is a web-based
electronic mail account.

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19. A computer-readable medium containing computer-executable instructions
which, when executed, perform the method of claim 1.

20. A device which, when accessed, performs the method of claim 1.
21. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is an electronic mail.
- 5 22. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is an instant message.
23. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is a short message service message.
- 10 24. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is a file transfer.
25. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is a telephone call.
26. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication conveys audibly
15 perceptive information.
27. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication conveys visually perceptive information.
- 20 28. A computer-implemented method for receiving and processing communications according to a value, comprising:
determining whether the communication is associated with a frank, the frank corresponding to a value;

in response to determining the communication is not associated with a frank,
processing the communication according to at least one default rule; otherwise
determining a class to which the frank corresponds;
in response to determining the class to which the frank corresponds,
5 processing the communication according to at least one class-based rule.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of processing the communication
comprises:
determining whether the frank corresponds to a class which is less than a
10 specified minimum class; and
in response to determining the frank corresponds to a class which is less than a
specified minimum class, discarding the communication.

30. The method of claim 29, further comprising the step of, in response to
15 determining the frank corresponds to a class which is not less than a specified
minimum class, transmitting the communication from a network node to a recipient
system.

31. The method of claim 30, where the communication is transmitted by way of at
20 least one Internet service provider.

32. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of processing the communication
comprises:

determining whether the frank corresponds to a class which is greater than a specified minimum class; and

in response to determining the frank corresponds to a class which is greater than a specified minimum class, discarding the communication.

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33. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of processing the communication according to at least one class-based rule further comprises:

determining whether the class is less than a specified minimum class; and

10 in response to determining the class is less than a specified minimum service class, delaying delivery of the communication.

34. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of processing the communication according to at least one class-based rule comprises:

determining whether the class is less than a specified minimum class; and

15 in response to determining the class is less than a specified minimum class, placing the communication in a recipient-specified location.

35. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of processing the communication comprises:

20 determining whether the frank corresponds to a class greater than or equal to a specified minimum class; and

in response to determining the frank corresponds to a class greater than or equal to a specified minimum class, displaying at least a portion of the communication in a specified color.

5 36. The method of claim 28, further comprising:

 determining whether a characteristic of a sender of the communication matches at least one entry on an approved list; and

 in response to determining the characteristic of the sender matches at least one entry on the approved list, ignoring the step of processing the communication

10 according to at least one class-based rule.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein the characteristic of the sender is one of an electronic mail address, a name, or an Internet protocol address.

15 38. The method of claim 28, further comprising:

 determining whether a characteristic of a sender of the communication matches at least one entry on an approved list; and

 in response to determining the characteristic of the sender matches at least one entry on the approved list, assigning a second class to the communication.

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39. The method of claim 38, wherein the step of processing the communication according to at least one class-based rule comprises applying the class-based rule to the higher class of the class and the second class.

40. The method of claim 34, wherein the communication is an electronic mail.
41. The method of claim 34, wherein the communication is a telephone call.
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42. The method of claim 34, further comprising:
- receiving a second communication;
- determining whether the second communication includes a second frank;
- in response to determining the second communication does include a second
- 10 frank, determining a second class to which the frank corresponds; and
- determining a display order for the first and second communications, the
- display order based on the first class and the second class.
43. A computer-readable medium containing computer-executable instructions
- 15 which, when executed, perform the method of claim 28.
44. A computer-implemented software application which, when accessed,
- performs the method of claim 39.
- 20 45. A frank for an electronic communication, comprising:
- an electronic communication handling instruction; and
- an indication of a class associated with a predetermined value, the
- predetermined value based on the electronic communication handling instruction.

46. The frank of claim 45, wherein the electronic communication handling instruction comprises a transmission priority.

5 47. The frank of claim 46, wherein the electronic communication handling instruction comprises a valid transmission time frame bounded by a first transmission time indicating an earliest permitted time of transmission, and a last transmission time indicating a latest time of transmission.

10 48. The frank of claim 45, wherein the electronic communication handling instruction comprises a network transmission route.

49. The frank of claim 45, wherein the electronic communication handling instruction comprises a transmission time delay.

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50. The frank of claim 45, wherein the electronic communication handling instruction comprises a maximum communication size.

51. The frank of claim 45, wherein the electronic communication handling
20 instruction comprises a device priority.

52. The frank of claim 45, wherein the electronic communication handling instruction comprises an economic value to be credited to an account associated with a recipient.

5 53. A frank for an electronic communication, comprising:
a maximum communication size;
a device priority; and
an indication of a class associated with a predetermined value, the
predetermined value based on a combination of the maximum communication size
10 and the device priority.

54. A frank for an electronic communication, comprising:
a transmission priority;
a valid transmission time frame characterized by a first transmission time
15 indicating an earliest permitted time of transmission; and
an indication of a class associated with a predetermined value, the
predetermined value based on a combination of the transmission priority and valid
transmission time frame.

20 55. A frank for an electronic communication, comprising:
an economic value to be credited to an account associated with a recipient;
a transmission priority; and

an indication of a class associated with a predetermined value, the predetermined value based on a combination of the transmission priority and economic value to be credited to an account associated with a recipient.

5 56. A method for sharing revenue across a network, comprising:

 associating an economic value with one of a plurality of pre-defined franks;

 associating the pre-defined frank with a communication;

 transmitting the communication across a network to a recipient system;

 in response to satisfying a receipt condition, transferring a portion of the
10 economic value to the recipient.

57. The method of claim 56, wherein the step of associating an economic value with one of a plurality of pre-defined franks comprises:

 choosing one of the plurality of pre-defined franks, each of the plurality of
15 pre-defined franks comprising a set fee and an indicia; and

 paying the set fee.

58. The method of claim 57, wherein the step of associating the pre-defined frank with a communication comprises:

20 relating the indicia to the communication; and

 instructing, via the indicia, the recipient system regarding the processing of the communication.

59. The method of claim 58, wherein the step of transferring a portion of the economic value to the recipient comprises transferring a portion of the economic value as specified by the indicia to the recipient.

5 60. The method of claim 58, further comprising the steps of:
during transmitting the communication across a network, receiving the communication at a network node; and
in response to receiving the communication at a network node, transferring a second portion of the economic value to an account associated with the network node.

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61. The method of claim 60, wherein the network node is an Internet service provider.

62. The method of claim 61, wherein the network node is an Internet service
15 provider associated with the recipient.

63. The method of claim 57, wherein the portion of the economic value is the entirety of the whole of the economic value.

20 64. The method of claim 56, further comprising the step of in response to not satisfying a receipt condition, transferring a portion of the economic value to a sender of the communication.

65. The method of claim 56, wherein the receipt condition comprises accessing the communication; and

wherein the step of transferring a portion of the economic value to the recipient comprises:

5 acknowledging to a third party accessing the communication;
transferring, via the third party, the portion of the economic value from an account associated with a sender of the communication to an account associated with the recipient.

10 66. A computer-readable medium containing instructions which, when executed, perform the method of claim 57.